British Journal for Military History

Volume 12, Issue 3, November 2026

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 20 November 2026

Citation: James Hagerty, 'The Intersection of Military requirements and missionary aspirations in British India: Catholic Army Chaplains in the Second Afghan War, 1878-1880', *British Journal for Military History*, 12.3 (2026), pp. 78-105.

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The BJMH is produced with the support of Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The intersection of military requirements and missionary aspirations in British India: Catholic Army Chaplains in the Second Afghan War, 1878-1880

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ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to further an understanding, albeit in a limited historical context, of how the interests of the British administration and the Catholic Church in India intersected through the ministry of chaplains who, at the request of British military authorities, tended the spiritual needs of Catholic soldiers in the Second Afghan War. It seeks also to show that whilst fulfilling chaplaincy duties Catholic missionaries simultaneously endeavoured to establish structures for evangelisation in a hostile cultural environment and debilitating climatic and topographical conditions.

Introduction

The increasing availability and accessibility of military and religious archival sources has stimulated interest in and generated research into the historical development of military chaplaincy and has provided fresh and detailed insights into the role and effectiveness of chaplains in war and in peace. The publication of studies relating to religion, churches and societies in war has also enabled historians of military chaplaincy to contextualise their research in a wider field of historiography, particularly when studying chaplaincy in twentieth century conflicts.[1] Studies of chaplaincy in earlier

*Dr James Hagerty has published studies on Catholic chaplains to the British armed forces and wishes to thank Father Stephen Giles MHM, Archivist of the Mill Hill Missionaries, for his generous assistance in the preparation of this article.
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i3.1996

[1]See for example: A. Billings, *The Dove, the Fig Leaf and the Sword: Why Christianity changes its mind about war,* (London: SPCK, 2014) M. Dempsey, *The Priest Among the Soldiers,* (London: Burns & Oates, 1947); J. Hagerty and B Hudd, *Defend Us in Battle: Catholic Chaplains in the British Military,* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2024); P. Howson, *Muddling Through: The Organization of British Army Chaplaincy in World War One,* (Solihull:

periods are limited but material may be found in religious records, military monographs, memoirs, regimental histories, historical journals and academic theses all of which facilitate a deeper understanding of the chaplain's role as a representative of an institution devoted to peace while at the same time working among military personnel trained for war.[2]

Whilst genuinely concerned for the spiritual welfare of Catholics in the military, British Catholic bishops in the Victorian era did not see Catholics in the armed forces and Catholic military chaplains as part of an episcopal remit which focussed on the expansion of the domestic Church. Consequently, Catholic historians have tended to research prominent features of the developing Church such as chapels, schools, congregations and clerical personalities, and the history of Catholics in the armed forces and their chaplains has been largely overlooked.[3] This paper offers a partial corrective to this imbalance by introducing a range of ecclesiastical sources which illustrate the religious milieux and military circumstances in which Victorian Catholic army chaplains ministered.

As studies in missiology testify, Christian denominations in Victorian Britain conducted foreign missions in a period when the spreading of Christianity, especially Anglicanism, was regarded as an essential element of British imperialism.[4] Missionary institutes fulfilled their primary function of evangelisation in territories under British rule and influence and with British military protection. In return they addressed the religious

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Helion & Company Limited, 2013); W. Sheils (Ed.) *Church and War*, Studies in Church History, vol. 20, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1983); M. Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department: Clergy Under Fire,* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008).

[2]See for example: D. L. Bergen (Ed.), *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-first Century,* (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Dow, A. C., *Ministers to the Soldiers of Scotland: A History of the Military Chaplains of Scotland prior to the War in the Crimea,* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962); A. Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642-1651,* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990); Rev O. S. Watkins, *With Kitchener's Army,* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1899).

[3]See G. A. Beck, *The English Catholics 1850-1950,* (London: Burns Oates, 1950) and V. A. McClelland and M. Hodgetts, *From Without the Flaminian Gate: 150 Years of Roman Catholicism in England and Wales 1850-2000,* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999).

[4]See R. Strong (Ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume III: Partisan Anglicanism and its Global Expansion 1829-c.1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); H. M. Carey, '*Overseas Missions'* in C. M. Mangion and S. O'Brien (Eds.), *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, Volume IV: Building Identity, 1830–1913*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

needs of occupying armies, colonial officials and trading communities whilst simultaneously attempting to moderate the social excesses of soldiers.[5]

The Catholic Church, with its universal religious perspective, acknowledged the benefits of imperial arrangements but was acutely aware of international and institutional competition for papal favour among Catholic missionary orders as they established foreign missions. In consequence, Propaganda Fide, the dicastery responsible for missionary activity, was ever watchful of maintaining a balance between spreading the faith, encouraging missionary institutes and ensuring the favour and protection of Britain and other European imperial powers.[6]

This paper shows how the connection between British imperial politics, the Vatican and Catholic missionary orders was exemplified in the late-nineteenth century on India's north-west frontier where Afghanistan's strategic position threatened British interests. Britain had mounted an unsuccessful campaign to impose its influence over Afghanistan in the First Afghan War, 1839-1842, but British attempts to further prevent outside interference in Afghanistan coincided, later in the century, with increased Russian interest in the region. Anglo-Russian diplomatic tension mounted as each power sought to exert dominance over Afghan politics, rulers, economics and people and the Second Afghan War (1878-1880), involving Britain and Afghanistan but not Russia, began as a result of the failure of Anglo-Afghan diplomatic manoeuvres.[7]

The British army in India requested the Vatican to provide chaplains for Catholic British soldiers engaged in the conflict and in 1879 the Vatican selected the Mill Hill Missionaries, an English male religious institute, for this task. In exchange, the Vatican promised the institute future exclusive Catholic missionary rights in Afghanistan with the assurance of British political and military protection. The Mill Hill Missionaries acceded to the Vatican's request.

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[5]M. Snape, 'Missions and the Military: the British Empire and Commonwealth, *c.*1800 –1960' in B. Stanley (Ed.), *Christianity and Empire Revisited*, (Brill: Ebook, 2025). Snape examines the complex relationships between religious and military dimensions in British imperial history.

[6]A Dicastery is a department of the Roman Curia, the administrative body of the Holy See. Propaganda Fide was established in the seventeenth century. See P. Hallett, *A Catholic* Dictionary, (London: Virtue & Co., 1954).

[7]For analyses and interpretations of the development of nineteenth century Afghanistan see M. Bayly, *Taming the Imperial Imagination, Colonial Knowledge, International Relations, and the Anglo-Afghan Encounter, 1808–1878*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2016) and B. D. Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

The archives of the Mill Hill Missionaries provide sufficient material on which to base a study of the institute's contribution to military chaplaincy in the Second Afghan War. By consulting in-house histories, institutional correspondence, individual records and clerical accounts of wartime experiences, the British empire and army in India can be viewed through the prism of a nascent religious institute anxious for its priests to fulfil their vocation and to please both its Church and imperial masters.[8] An examination of Mill Hill's military mission also affords deeper insights into the chaplain's role in providing spiritual welfare to soldiers, his place in the wider imperial milieu and his value to military authorities.[9]

This article reveals the complex inter-relationship between Britain's military and political control over India, Afghanistan's importance in Britain's protection of India's north-west frontier, Sacred Propaganda's world-view of Catholic evangelization, and the routine spiritual work of Catholic chaplains among soldiers. As they conducted their ministry in the Second Afghan War at the behest of the British military, Mill Hill chaplains were subject to the army's battlefield tactics and pervasive bureaucracy, Afghan opposition to external interference in its affairs, and Vatican missionary politics. The army's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1880 demonstrated the Vatican's dependence on British imperial policy and Mill Hill's dependence on the Vatican's authority. The missionaries attempted to fulfil their vocation and bravely conducted their original remit to the army but this account shows that they were prevented from laying the foundations of a promised mission in Afghanistan by political, military, cultural and religious factors well beyond their control.

St Joseph's Foreign Missionary Society and Afghanistan

St Joseph's Foreign Missionary Society, founded in 1866 by Father (Fr) Herbert Vaughan, became known as the Mill Hill Missionaries after its seminary, St Joseph's College, was established at Mill Hill, north-west London, in 1869.[10] The Society's early professors and recruits came from England, Prussia, Ireland, Belgium, Holland, the Tyrol and the United States of America, however, and although English in origin it soon assumed an international, multi-lingual character. Vaughan sought 'new territories' for his missionaries and such missionary fields included Britain's recently-

[8]The Mill Hill Missionaries Archives are kept at the Mill Hill Missionaries Heritage Centre; https://millhillmissionaries.com/mill-hill-archives/. Accessed 22 May 2026.

[9]For a pioneering study of Catholic military chaplaincy, see T. Johnstone and J. Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman: 1996).

[10]Fr Herbert Vaughan (1832-1903). A priest of the Westminster Archdiocese, Vaughan was successively Bishop of Salford (1872) and Archbishop of Westminster (1892). See P. Hughes, 'The Bishops of the Century' in Beck, *The English Catholics,* pp.164-171, p,470.

proclaimed Indian Empire.[11] In 1875, Bishop Stephen Fennelly, Vicar Apostolic of Madras, invited Fr David Forbes and three other Mill Hill priests to minister in the Telugu mission in Andhra Pradesh where they were immediately confronted with an epidemic, care for the sick and the distribution of aid.[12] However, the Mill Hill Missionaries were later required to undertake another challenge.

On 18 January 1879, Fr Peter Benoit, Rector of St Joseph's College, was informed by Monsignor Henry O'Callaghan, Roman agent for the Bishops of England and Wales, that Pope Leo XIII had ordered Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda, 'to provide at once for the spiritual wants of the English soldiers engaged in the war with Afghanistan.'[13] For this assignment, Simeoni chose the Mill Hill Missionaries who, in 1879, were the only English overseas missionary order. The Vatican, therefore, had little choice when assembling English army chaplains for Afghanistan.[14] Simeoni informed Benoit that the Pope,

> … desired me to write and offer you a district in that quarter to be formed into a Prefecture. He wishes to know if you are able to send three or four priests,

[11]T. Rafferty MHM, *The Crimson Lily in our Midst: St Joseph's Missionary Society (Mill Hill) in the Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and North-West Frontier Province,* (Mill Hill: Mill Hill Missionaries, 2007), pp.13-15. Fr Rafferty relied on J. Van der Klugt MHM and M. Conroy MHM, *The Opening Door. Mill Hill Mission to Afghanistan: 1878-1882. History of the Diocese of Rawalpindi: Part 1*. (Rawalpindi: Pastoral Institute Publication Centre. Multan, 1979).

[12]Maire Ni Chearbhaill, 'The Fennelly Brothers and the Maynooth Mission to India' in S. Ryan (Ed.), *Treasures of Irish Christianity, (Volume 111), To the Ends of the Earth*, (Dublin: Veritas, 2015), pp.127-129. Missionary regions where a Church hierarchy has not been established are governed by a papal delegate who is usually a bishop and designated a Vicar Apostolic. Prefectures are missionary regions insufficiently developed to be an Apostolic Vicariate. *The Tablet*, 29 April, 1876. *The Tablet*, a Catholic periodical, was founded by Frederick Lucas in 1840. It campaigned vigorously in the nineteenth century for the official appointment or commissioning of Catholic army and naval chaplains.

[13]See M. E. Williams, *The Venerable English College, Rome: A History* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2008); and after Vaughan was appointed Bishop of Salford, he delegated daily supervision of the Society to Fr Benoit. See Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily,* 15.

[13]See E. Cruise, 'Development of the Religious Orders' in Beck, *The English Catholics,* p.470.

[14]See E. Cruise, 'Development of the Religious Orders' in Beck, *The English Catholics,* (London: Burns Oates, 1950), p.470.

> English or Irish, who may be able to attend also to the natives, and will obtain recognition from the English government as army chaplains.[15]

Assuming that the British intended 'to make a permanent occupation' in Afghanistan, Propaganda offered the Mill Hill Missionaries 'this new mission'. The Vicar Apostolic of Agra had been requested to make temporary provision and had sent some Italian Capuchin missionaries but Propaganda repeated the Pope's intention to have English or Irish missionaries. 'An Irish name' wrote O'Callaghan, 'would fit the purpose'.[16] A government 'subsidy' may be forthcoming but, if not, Propaganda would endeavour to make some financial provision. Simeoni 'wished to know without delay' if the Mill Hill authorities were disposed to accede to the Pope's wishes.[17]

Vaughan accepted Propaganda's offer and Simeoni wrote that the Pope was 'gratified'.[18] Vaughan's concern, however, was that the Society's mission in Afghanistan did not become primarily devoted to the military. 'The army commitment might be predominant for the time being', he wrote, 'but it would be continued only if a local mission could be maintained at the same time'.[19]

Emphasising the Afghan threat to the British empire in India and the bleak contemporary view of both the military campaign and the religious extremism of the Afghans, *The Tablet* stated that the task facing the Mill Hill Missionaries [20]

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[15]Archives of Mill Hill Missionary Society (hereinafter AMHMS), Pakistan Archives 1879-1882, Box 1, Kashmir and Afghanistan, O'Callaghan to Vaughan, 30 January 1879.
[16]Ibid., O'Callaghan to Vaughan, 30 January 1879. Archives of Mill Hill Missionary Society, Pakistan Archives 1879-1882, Box 1, Kashmir and Afghanistan (hereinafter AMHMS). The Vatican's insistence on English and Irish priests related to the language barrier between British soldiers and Italian missionaries in India. The Italian title 'padre' was adopted by British troops in India and remains in use in the British military when addressing a chaplain. Soldiers of all ranks had difficulty relating to European missionaries who could not speak or spoke little English and this affected military morale. A Mill Hill account mentions 'Irish' but omits 'English'. *The Opening Door*, p. 10, p.14. None of the Mill Hill Missionaries who served in the Afghan War were Irish. They included one Englishman (Fr Jackson), one German (Fr Temme), one American (Fr Browne), one Canadian (Fr Burke) and four Dutchmen (Frs Raatger, Van Eyndthoven, Aelen and Prenger), all priests. The five European missionaries sent to Afghanistan were proficient in spoken and written English.
[17]AMHMS, Cardinal Prefect of Sacred Propaganda to Superior of St Joseph's Missionary Society, 18 January 1879.
[18]Ibid., Simeoni to Vaughan, 31 January 1879.
[19]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily in our Midst*, p.21.
[20]*The Tablet*, 9 November 1878.

> … will be an arduous one. They will have at first to endure the hardships of a military life…and their missionary labours will be among a fanatical people who are trained up with the idea that in putting to death an apostle of God's Church they are performing an act pleasing to God. [21]

The Second Afghan War

The Afghan War of 1878-1880 was the result of Britain's response to Russia's diplomatic incursion into Afghanistan and a perceived threat to the north-west frontier region of British India. In July 1878 an uninvited Russian mission arrived in Kabul but was then welcomed with Britain subsequently demanding that the Emir accept a similar British mission. This was denied and a British mission was refused entry. In November 1878, three columns of British and Indian troops were sent to Afghanistan to assert British influence. However, the Russian mission had left, and in May 1878 the Emir was forced to accept British terms. Two British columns returned to India while one remained in Kandahar. Another British mission under Sir Louis Cavagnari was despatched to Kabul but, in September 1879, he and his mission were killed by Afghans.[22] The British sent three columns totalling some forty thousand men to exact retribution and exert influence.[23] It was to this force that the Mill Hill chaplains were to minister.

Major-General Frederick Roberts' Kabul Field Force of seven thousand troops left Kandahar for Kabul on 27 September. They reached Kabul on 9 October but on 23 December they were besieged in the fortified cantonment of Sherpur outside Kabul by fifty thousand Afghans. Roberts defeated the Afghans and re-entered Kabul. On 19 April 1880, Lieutenant-General Donald Stewart, having defeated an Afghan force at Ahmed Khel, between Kabul and Kandahar, met up with Roberts but as they were preparing to return to India, news arrived that on 27 July Major-General George Burrows' force of 2,476 men had been heavily defeated by over 12,000 Afghans at Maiwand, 45 miles west of Kandahar. 969 British and Indian troops were killed in action and 177 were wounded, and 3,000 Afghans were killed. In ensuing days, the survivors, under the command of Lieutenant-General James Primrose, struggled back

[21] *The Tablet*, 19 April 1879.

[22] The war of 1878-1880 is generally referred to as the Second Afghan War. The First Afghan War, 1838-1842, had involved Britain and the Emirate of Kabul. See I. Knight, *Go To Your God Like A Soldier: The British Soldier Fighting for Empire* 1837-1902, (Greenhill Books: London, 1996), pp.55-68.

[23] A. Mallinson, *The Making of the British Army: From the English Civil War to the War on Terror,* (Bantam Press: London, 2009), pp.214-215.

to Kandahar, which the Afghans then proceeded to besiege.[24] Roberts and his force marched 334 miles from Kabul in twenty-three days, inflicted heavy losses on the Afghans and relieved Kandahar on 1 September.[25] British influence was restored but Victorians regarded Maiwand as a severe British military reverse.[26]

That the Second Afghan War was fierce and brutal was testified by the awarding of sixteen Victoria Crosses. After some official debate as to whether a chaplain could be awarded the honour, one was eventually awarded to the Reverend James Adams, an Irish-born, experienced Anglican chaplain of the Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment, serving with the Kabul Field Force at Killa Kazi.[27] 1,850 British and Indian men had been killed in action in the conflict while an estimated 8,000 more died of disease and sickness.[28]

Army Chaplains in India

The British Army Chaplains' Department was established in 1796, but did not provide chaplains for British regiments in India.[29] Chaplains on the sub-continent, in British and Indian regiments, were appointed and financed by the East India Company and, after the Company was disbanded in 1858, by the Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and

[24]C. Jackson, 'General James Primrose: Reconstructing A Life' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research,* vol. 97, no. 389, Summer 2019, pp.147-167.

[25]Ian Knight, *Go To Your God Like A Soldier,* (London: National Army Museum, 1996), pp. 55-68.

[26]*The Tablet,* 2 October 1880*,* referred to it as '…the disastrous affair at Maiwand.' See B. Robson, 'Maiwand, 27th July 1880' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 51, No. 208 (Winter, 1973), pp.194-224.

[27]J. Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer: The Story of the Army Chaplains* (London: Mowbray, 1968), pp.117-120; 'The First Parson VC' in *Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department,* vol. XI, June 1956, pp.191-194.

[28]B. Robson, *The Road to Kabul: The Second Afghan War 1879-1881,* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2007), p.299. Knight, quotes Rudyard Kipling's poem *The Young British Soldier*: 'When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains, An' the women come out to cut up what remains, Jest roll to your rifle an' blow out your brains, An' go to your Gawd like a soldier'.

[29]In 1882 the Marquess of Hartington, in a parliamentary reply to a question about military chaplains in India, said, "'There are no military chaplains in India, Protestant or Catholic" but there were clerics "paid for religious duties to the army when required"". Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, 16 March 1882, vol. 267, cc1005-1006. Such chaplains were not on the British army's establishment and were funded by the Presidencies. Catholic priests were first commissioned as British army chaplains in 1858. For the history of Catholic chaplains, see Hagerty and Hudd, *Defend Us in Battle: Catholic Chaplains in the British Military*, (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2024).

Bombay. The Company Presidencies had their own armies but no chaplaincy structure.[30] Civilian clergy serving as chaplains in India had no commission or rank and later on came under the military jurisdiction of the Adjutant General in the Indian Government's Military Department. The official request to the Pope for chaplains for Afghanistan came from the Indian Government via the Vicars Apostolic in India. [31]

Ballhatchet estimated that in the mid-nineteenth century at least a half of British soldiers in India were Catholic while Mill Hill sources indicate that in areas served by their missionaries in the Second Afghan War, about twenty per cent of the soldiers were Catholic.[32] Whichever assessment is taken, and assuming that most Irish soldiers were Catholic, there were significant numbers of Catholic soldiers in India requiring the ministry of Catholic padres.

Most army chaplains in India were ministers of the Church of England, Church of Scotland and the Anglican Church Missionary Society who received higher remuneration and greater emoluments than their Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Baptist and Catholic counterparts, a source of persistent discontent to the Catholic Vicars Apostolic. Ecclesiastical responsibility for Catholic army chaplains in southern India rested with the Jesuit-run Vicariate of Bombay and for chaplains in northern India by the Capuchin-staffed Vicariates of Agra and Patna. Providing army chaplains placed a strain on vicariates, a task further complicated by the army's unwritten policy against the employment of Irish priests who were regarded as a source of political disaffection among Irish troops.[33] The Vatican, meanwhile, was anxious to relieve the stresses of an additional military ministry on over-stretched vicariates whilst simultaneously maintaining British favour and protection.

The armies of the Presidencies included Indian and European Christian soldiers and missionaries served them and British regiments either as Acting Chaplains at the full-time service of the military in times of war, or as part-time Officiating Chaplains ministering to military and ex-patriate civil communities in peacetime and in war.[34] Catholic chaplains were traditionally recruited from Italian and French missionary orders such as Jesuits, Capuchins and Franciscans but since the opening of the Irish

[30]Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer*, p.111.
[31]AMHMS, Horace Walpole, India Office to Bishop Vaughan: 'Employment and allowance of Roman Catholic chaplains rests on the Government of India', 10 February 1879.
[32]See K. Ballhatchet, 'Missionaries, Empire and society: the Jesuit mission in Calcutta, 1834–1846' in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* vol. 7 (1978), pp.18–34; Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.19.
[33]Ibid., pp.21-22.
[34]Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer*, p.111.

colleges of Maynooth in 1795 and All Hallows in 1842, an increasing number of Irish missionaries arrived in India.[35] Both Indian and British armies had substantial numbers of Irish soldiers, accompanied by their families, and there were strong Irish-Catholic military networks in which missionaries were prominent and who were largely sustained by Catholic troops.[36] Sudden increases in military personnel, as for example during the Indian Uprising of 1857, were likely to include Catholics thus placing an added burden on missionary institutes.[37] British authorities meanwhile considered the increase in Irish-Catholic chaplains to be politically unwelcome.[38]

While Catholic soldiers and their families would be familiar with Latin as the medium of liturgies such as the Mass, British military authorities informed the Vatican that English-speaking troops found it difficult to relate to European chaplains whose first language was not English. The morale of English Catholic soldiers was likely to have been adversely affected, especially before battle, by their inability to engage in meaningful counselling sessions or receive the Sacrament of Penance from a non-English counsellor or confessor.[39]

Mill Hill Army Chaplains in the Second Afghan War: First Cohort

On 15 February 1879, Bishop Vaughan wrote to Fr Forbes informing him of the Pope's intentions and ordering him to be ready to accompany Fr Browne and the other missionaries bound for Afghanistan. 'The fact is', wrote Vaughan,

> … the Holy See has urgently requested me to undertake the Afghanistan mission without delay. It is to be formed into a Prefecture. The plan laid down by Leo XIII is that we should send three or four chaplains to Afghanistan as military chaplains, first to attend to the soldiers and then to insinuate ourselves into the confidence of the natives. The chaplaincies are to be the stepping stones to the missions and are to form a preliminary protection.[40]

On 14 April 1879, after Vaughan had accepted Propaganda's invitation to provide chaplains, the first cohort of Mill Hill Missionaries – Frs George Browne, Richard Burke, John Aelen, and John Van Eyndthoven – left for Afghanistan '… in obedience

[35] See K. Condon, *The Missionary College of All Hallows, 1842-1891,* (Dublin: All Hallows College, 1986).
[36]See B. Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth Century India,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.91-93.
[37]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.19.
[38]Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks,* pp.94-96.
[39]See Reference 18 above.
[40]AMHMS, Vaughan to Forbes, 15 February 1879. Fr Forbes did not become a chaplain.

to the directions of the Holy See.'[41] *The Tablet* stressed the significance of the occasion and the importance of the mission selected by the Vatican:

> The departure of these missioners … to the far north of India … will bring a soothing comfort into many an English and Irish home, when the public will know that, besides the primary duty of evangelising the heathens, the Holy Father has imposed on these missioners the duty of attending to the spiritual wants of the Catholic soldiers who are now fighting the battles of their country in Afghanistan. But the great and more general cause of joy is that these Fathers go forth to plant the cross in a heathen country and bring the light of Gospel, which we enjoy in its fullness, to people that are in darkness and the shadow of death.[42]

Vaughan reminded the missionaries of their primary objectives: 'Seek to win and influence the natives, as far as possible; and remember that the Holy Spirit has sent you as missioners to the native races, as well as for the time being as chaplains to the army of occupation'.[43]

After a month's journey, the priests arrived at Bombay and were welcomed by Bishop Meurin the Jesuit Vicar Apostolic and a former army chaplain in India.[44] Fr Browne had been appointed Superior of the Mission to Afghanistan by the Mill Hill authorities but this title carried no military jurisdiction over his confrères.[45] He, Fr Aelen and Fr Burke were to undertake their ministry to the military while the recently ordained Fr Van Eyndthoven was intended for duty in the Vicariate of Madras. However, three priests were considered inadequate for work with the military and Bishop Fennelly permitted Fr Van Eyndthoven to accompany his companions on the proviso that another Mill Hill missionary was sent to replace him. Frs Aelen and Burke set out for Kandahar via Karachi while Frs Browne and Van Eyndthoven began the long northward journey to the strategically important towns of Quetta and Peshawar.[46] According to army regulations, Fr Browne stated, they had 'to buy each a horse, tents, camp furniture,

[41]Ibid., *Tenth Annual Report 1879*.
[42]AMHMS, *The Tablet*, 17 April 1879.
[43]*The Opening Door*, p.10.
[44]Families in British India Society (hereinafter FBIS), *Dictionary of Indian Biography, Database.* https://www.fibis.org/. Accessed 2 June 2026.
[45]*The Crimson Lily*, pp.20-21. Fr Browne's letters include details of the military deployment of the missionaries. See also AMHMS, Browne to Benoit, 9 December 1879.
[46]*The Opening Door*, pp.13-14. Bishop Fennelly also gave the missionaries detailed instructions on their religious and social duties rather than their military responsibilities. Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.22.

kitchen utensils etc. ... besides we shall have to have each 3 servants viz a horse keeper, a grasscutter & a cook …'[47] From then on the missionaries were to quickly learn the a 'chaplain's work with troops on the frontier allowed for neither comfort, settlement nor stagnation'.[48]

On arrival at Quetta on 5 June, Frs Browne and Van Eyndthoven initially assumed cantonment duties but were subsequently deployed by army headquarters at Simla. Fr Browne was sent to Peshawar and the Kurram Field Force where 'the heat was intense and we are in the midst of cholera'. There he learned that the 'Capuchins have been recalled by their bishop but no new arrangements have been made as to the new chaplains'. The Capuchins had been acting as chaplains and were disappointed that Mill Hill Missionaries were to be entrusted with the new Afghan mission but Fr Browne found individual Capuchin missionaries helpful.[49]

Fr Van Eyndthoven went to the mountain village of Landi Khotal in the Khyber Pass where he found three hundred soldiers in tented hospitals and cholera-stricken Catholic soldiers dying without the ministry of a priest. He began his work among the 17th Regiment of Foot - later the Leicestershire Regiment. on 28 June.

The following day, Fr Van Eyndthoven celebrated Mass at which 355 soldiers were present. On 11 July, he wrote to Mill Hill with an account of his work and complaining of the debilitating heat. The field hospital and cholera camp and the 17th Regiment, with 173 Catholics, had been moved nearer the 12th Regiment, which was later the Suffolk Regiment, but they were still a substantial distance from each other. He was permitted to move to a more convenient location and was assisted by soldiers of all ranks including 'our 3 Catholic doctors'. He heard confessions in a sergeant's tent and was given permission to pitch three tents side-by-side, accommodating 250 men and where Mass was celebrated three times a week. He ended by saying that it was impossible to speak individually with soldiers about their spiritual lives 'as they are mixed with all kinds of religious sects'. On 13 July Fr Van Eyndthoven was admitted to the hospital suffering from dysentery and died four days later. [50] He was cared for by

[47]AMHMS, Browne to Benoit, 23 May 1879.
[48]Quoted in 'The First Parson VC' in *Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department,* vol. XI, June 1956, p.192.'
[49]*The Opening Door*, pp.12-13.
[50]AMHMS, Memoir of Fr Van Eyndthoven. Bishop Fennelly suggested that Fr Van Eyndthoven change his surname to 'Endoven'. The name on his tombstone was 'Eindhoven'. Vaughan wrote to Benoit on 14 September 1879: 'these foreign names prejudice the govt and officials against our men before they see them …' and suggested that they be Anglicised as soon as possible. *The Opening Door*, p.11. See also B. Sullivan MHM, 'The Road to Kabul', in *Missions and Missionaries*, Autumn 1983, p.6. The

Dr Alfred Rattigan, a Catholic doctor of the Bengal Presidency's Army Medical Service.[51]

The soldiers had quickly come to know their chaplain and appreciated his work. Quarter-Master John Fallon of the 17th Regiment wrote,

> He came out to us here newly ordained and set himself to work with zeal among his flock until he could do no more. He had to go to the hospital himself; from his sick bed he went to attend to a man taken to the cholera camp, and died the next day.' In the absence of a priest, Quarter-Master Fallon conducted the burial and soldiers of all denominations attended the funeral.[52]

Fr Browne, now with Roberts' Kabul Field Force, found Kabul 'a nasty, dirty, filthy hole much worse than Peshawar'. He tried to purchase grapes for altar wine from 'some Armenians' but 'they would take no pay from the padre'; they were delighted to see a priest, welcomed him and treated him with the utmost respect.[53] He was now ministering to over a thousand Catholic soldiers, 'more than one-fifth of the European soldiers,' in five stations covering forty miles between Kurrum and Alei-Kheyl.[54]

In April 1879, Fr Aelen was deployed with General Stewart's troops and accompanied them on the hazardous march from Kandahar to Kabul. By November 1879 he was again in Kandahar where he 'had plenty of work'. For some time, he celebrated two Masses on Sundays and visited Catholic soldiers unable to get to Church Parade or who were at distant outposts.[55] The chaplain was present at the battles of Ahmed Khel and Urzoe on 19 April 1880 and, at great personal risk, ministered to the spiritual needs of Catholics and others. He was listed in the officers involved in the action, was mentioned in despatches and later awarded the Afghan medal with the Ahmed Khel clasp.[56] In a leader about 'the gloomy campaign' in Afghanistan, the *Evening Standard* of 19 October 1880 commented.

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surname of Fr Aelen was Anglicised to 'Allen' either by the military through ignorance or by the Mill Hill authorities to make it more acceptable to the government. Fr Braun had changed his name to Browne in 1875. Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.21.

[51]FBIS, *Trousdale's Second Anglo-Afghan War database; The British in Afghanistan 1878-1881*, vol 1.

[52]AMHMS, Quarter-Master John Fallon to Fr Browne, 17 July 1879; 'Memoir of Father Van Eyndthoven'.

[53]*The Opening Door*, pp.16-17.

[54]Ibid., Browne to Goosens, 26 July 1879; 'Memoir of Father Van Eyndthoven'.

[55]Ibid., Aelen to Browne, 10 November 1979.

[56]*The Tablet*, 19 Aug 1882 and 24 November 1894; FBIS, *Trousdale's Second Anglo-Afghan War database; The British in Afghanistan 1878-1881*, vol 1. 181 officers took part in the

> … there are others, rated as non-combatants, who confront terrible risks without the heat of battle to inflame them, or the hope of distinction to beckon them on. Their conduct in the affairs in and about Kandahar is such as to do them high honour and stir the pulses of their countrymen at home to thankful enthusiasm. At a meeting at Simla recently, Sir Donald Stewart made a speech in which he paid marked compliment to the army chaplains in the field. He relates how he saw a Roman Catholic clergyman attending to the wounded in the fighting line of a British regiment. The General alludes to the Rev. John Allen who accompanied him in his march from Kandahar to Kabul. [57]

Fr Burke, who had been sent to Kandahar with Fr Aelen, replaced Fr Van Eyndthoven at Lundi Khotal. There he shared facilities with the Reverend J. Gelson Gregson, Secretary to the Soldiers' Total Abstinence Association of India formed to reduce drunkenness among the troops, and they both made use of the tents erected by Fr Van Eyndthoven. Reverend Gregson, a Baptist missionary, recalled that Fr Burke was in very bad health, suffering from the effects of sunstroke after travelling from Kandahar. He had been expected to die on the journey. 'The heat in crossing the sand was fearful', said Fr Burke,' but it had to be done; it was work for the Master … It would not have mattered if I had died, it was God's work, and that is worth dying for.'[58]

Mill Hill Chaplains in the Second Afghan War: Second Cohort

On 1 October 1879, three newly-ordained missionaries left Mill Hill 'on their way to Peshawar and then to Kabul' to unite with Frs Browne, Aelen and Burke 'to attend to the spiritual wants of the Catholic soldiers of the army on its return march through Afghanistan'. *The Tablet*, however, was in no doubt, once again, of their primary purpose and its attendant dangers,

> Their distinctive duty, when things are settled in those parts, will be to devote their time and attention to the conversion of the heathen and Mahomedan races. For, as it has been clearly explained by the founders and supporters of this English Foreign Missionary College, the primary object of the members educated by the institution is to furnish missionary priests for the pagan and infidel populations of the countries to which they may be sent. No doubt the

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action including 'Roman Catholic Chaplain: Father J. Allen'. See V.W. Ellis, *Kandahar Field Force, 1878-80,* (Bristol: E. S. and A. Robinson Ltd, 1912).

[57]Ibid., Cited in *The Tablet*, 13 November 1880.

[58]J. G. Gregson, *Through the Khyber Pass,* (London: Elliot Stock, 1883), pp.14-15. Reverend Gregson commented on harmonious working and social relations between missionary chaplains of different Christian denominations.

> new field of labour reserved for these generous volunteers in God's service is difficult and toilsome; but in it there are immortal souls to be saved, and to those who will contribute to the extension of God's Kingdom there is promised by Him a reward exceedingly great.[59]

The second cohort included Frs John Temme, Gerard Raatger and Thomas Jackson and according to the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore, they were bound 'for an unpleasing destination'.[60]

Mill Hill's 'Memoir of Fr Raatger' states that after arrival in India he travelled to Afghanistan 'which meant journeys either on foot or on horseback through suffocating hot valleys and over icy mountains and the Sacraments had often to be administered in dangerous circumstances.[61] At Peshawar, he and Fr Temme received instructions from Fr Browne to ensure that Fr Burke was well cared for before leaving for their military duties.[62]

Thomas Jackson was accepted by St Joseph's Missionary Society in July 1875 for priestly training and was ordained on 28 September 1879. [63] Thirty years later, he recalled: '… when I had been a priest three days, I left Mill Hill with two companions to go to Afghanistan to serve as volunteer chaplains to the British soldiers in the Afghan War.'[64]

Chaplains under Fire: Maiwand and other Engagements

Arriving in India, Fr Jackson immediately set off for Karachi and then Kandahar via army headquarters at Quetta. Attached to a convoy guarded by Indian soldiers he arrived at Quetta where he learned that non-combatants were prohibited from entering into Afghanistan. The military authorities were unaware of his coming and he stayed in Quetta for three months until being deployed with the 66th Regiment, later Royal Berkshire Regiment, and a part of Burrows' Brigade of 2,500 men, bound for Kandahar two hundred miles away. The commanding officer had received no information to indicate that Fr Jackson was a military chaplain and he could only

[59]*The Tablet*, 11 October 1879.
[60]Cited in *The Opening Door*, p.20.
[61]AMHMS, 'Memoir of Father Gerard Raatger'.
[62]Ibid., Browne to Raatger, 7 December 1879.
[63]Ibid., Fr Thomas Jackson, personal record, Fr Jackson's Afghan ministry and subsequent ministry was covered in D. Burton, *Valiant Men of God,* (London: St Paul Publications: 1963) under the title 'A Lancashire Hero: Thomas Jackson, Mill Hill Father (1844-1916)', pp.9-34.
[64]*St Joseph's Advocate*, Winter 1909. *Advocate* is the Mill Hill Missionaries' in-house journal.

provide him with a cart for his baggage. The padre was, for him, at a more serious disadvantage: he had received no faculties from a bishop to exercise his priestly duties.[65]



Figure 1: Officers & Thomas Jackson MHM (seated fourth from left).[66]

For five days, and in intense heat, wearing his cassock, the chaplain walked alongside the military column. They were attacked frequently and, as Reverend Alfred Cane, an experienced Anglican chaplain with British and Indian regiments, wrote: 'We had Father Jackson, the R.C. padre, out with us. He went on foot and was carrying about

[65]AMHMS, Jackson to Benoit. 20 November 1879.
[66]Image courtesy of Mill Hill Archives.

a cannon ball which passed by him. He might have made a collection of them.'[67] The column eventually faced and defeated a force of the Emir of Kandahar.[68]

Reverend Cane and Fr Jackson were then involved in the disaster at Maiwand and their accounts present a picture of the mayhem during which they experienced the full horrors of war whilst attending to their duties – tending the wounded, bringing them water, offering words of comfort and saying prayers over them amid the noise and detritus of battle. Reverend Cane wrote,

> Then came the most awful part. Wounded men lying down and giving all up. Others getting off their ponies or camels & lying down to die. All begging for water. Officers' kit was strewn about in all directions - wine or spirits all went down the throats of these thirsty men like water. I helped men on to their beasts & urged others on till the task became hopeless …[69]

Fr Jackson's account was equally graphic and distressing,

> As soon as the armies came within gunshot of each other the battle began with dreadful fury … Cannon balls and bullets began to fall on every side of us, and made dreadful havoc among our men. After an hour or two we were entirely surrounded … and it seemed all was lost, for I could not see how any of us could escape alive …

The Anglo-Indian force soon 'lost about half' its infantry and the situation deteriorated. Fr Jackson continued,

> And now began a scene which is beyond description. Worn out by fatigue and hunger, even those not wounded had scarcely strength to move out much less to resist the fire of the enemy. Most of the wounded had to be left on the field. Only a few of the wounded who had to be treated by the doctors had been placed on stretchers, but in the general panic the bearers threw down their burdens and left the wounded to look out for themselves. In utter despair of escaping, some were seen to take their own lives. Volley after volley was fired on us until the enemy had driven us into a barren desert where we likely to be

[67]B. Robson, 'The Kandahar Letters of the Reverend Alfred Cane' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Part 1, vol. 69, no. 279 (Autumn 1991), pp.146-160; Part 2, vol. 69, No. 280 (Winter 1991), pp. 206-220. Reverend Cane was an army chaplain with the Bombay Presidency and in 1880 was chaplain in Kandahar.
[68]*The Opening Door*, p.26.
[69]B. Robson, 'The Kandahar Letters of the Reverend Alfred Cane' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Part 2, vol. 69, No. 280 (Winter 1991), p.212.

> killed without cannon ball or bullet. I think if I live a hundred years, the horrors of what I saw and felt in the passage through that dreadful desert will ever cause me to shudder when I recall them to mind.[70]

Fr Jackson's bravery drew admiration from senior officers, one recalled,

> I never saw a man more earnestly devoted to his work and duty. He is one of the best and bravest men I ever met. On every march he walked the whole way in his long black gown amongst the European soldiers, talking to and encouraging them. During the action on the 27th I saw him walking about in the thickest of the fire quite unconcernedly.[71]

The retreat towards Kandahar, 'about 40 miles distant', brought more horror. 'The sight of the dead and the dying along the side of the road was enough to drive one mad', wrote Fr Jackson. 'Even dogs lay down and died for want of water' and officers 'broke open the medicine chests and drank the medicines to save themselves from perishing of thirst.' 'More dead than alive', they reached Kandahar on the evening of 28 July but there followed the siege of the city. All through August, as Afghan forces attacked and the besieged were cut off from 'the rest of the world', Fr Jackson continued his ministry. On 15 August, the eighteenth day of the siege, he said Mass in a large tent as 'our chapel had to be turned into a hospital.' He heard Confessions and administered the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, the Last Rites, but ordinary soldiers, despite knowing they could die any moment, seemed 'dreadfully ignorant and indifferent' and some refused the sacraments. Fr Jackson was 'glad to be able to add, however, that many of the Catholic officers … have shown a bright example in the practice of their religion.' A war correspondent who attended Mass celebrated by Fr Jackson was 'astonished at the intensified realistic feelings with which I assisted at the mass; but, as I have said, it was my first for some time. This little altar with its two tiny candles and all its diminutive essentials, electrified my whole soul …'[72]

One of the padre's more sombre duties was attending burial parties of the many dead soldiers lying immediately outside the city and cantonments. Stripped by Afghans, eaten by vultures, and decomposing in the heat, few men could be identified and were laid in trenches as the funeral service was read over them.[73] Reverend George Maxwell Gordon, a chaplain of the Church Missionary Society, had been shot dead on 16

[70] *The Opening Door*, pp.31-32.
[71] *The Globe*, 11 October 1880. Quoted in Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily,* p.70.
[72] *The Opening Door*, pp.31-32
[65] *The Opening Door*, pp.31-35; Burton, *Valiant Men of God*, pp.15-20.

August while helping to recover wounded soldiers.[74] Fr Jackson recalled that 'he was a most-kind hearted man and was always very civil and obliging to me.'[75] Reverend Cane also missed his colleague and reflected on his own and Fr Jackson's ministry,

> I hope I have been of some use in cheering up the wounded & others & perhaps in giving some comfort to the dying but I come miserably short. Father Jackson the R.C. priest has worked wonderfully well, going about in a black cassock with a scarlet cincture always, he never fails to be noticed and he has a most charming manner & and most liberal views.[76]

Others wrote of Fr Jackson's ministry during the retreat to Kandahar. Gunner William Hamilton Williams recalled that on the dangerous 40-mile trek,

> … a shell came so close to the Revd. Father Jackson, as to knock that gentleman down with its force, while he was following up the Infantry attending to the sick and wounded. He however soon regained his feet and gathering up his Clerical robes ran after the infantry to the general satisfaction of all.[77]

Gunner Williams recalled how 'the R.C. chaplain', was 'a great favourite with the column.'[78] Relying on these and other testimonies, *The Tablet* reported:

> As the column was retreating and the route was difficult and speed was necessary, like the other officers, the chaplain was provided with a camel but he noticed a wounded soldier dragging himself along on foot. Fr Jackson placed the soldier on the camel and he followed on walking by the side of a gun-carriage. Wearied and exhausted, he was unable to keep up with the retreat and became isolated in the midst of a wild dangerous country, inhabited by bitter, fanatic and hostile tribes. Somehow he managed, hiding by day and travelling by night, and almost starved to death, to overtake the column and reach Kandahar, where he remained during the long siege until General Roberts relieved the town. In token of admiration, Fr. Jackson was allegedly given the flag which had floated

[74]S. H. Shadbolt, *The Afghan Campaigns, of 1878-1880, vol. 2, Biographical Division* (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington: London,1882), pp.94-95.
[75]*The Opening Door*, p.34.
[76]Robson, 'The Kandahar Letters of the Reverend Alfred Cane' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Part 2, vol. 69, No. 280 (Winter 1991), p.220. The scarlet cincture, or waistband, was worn by Mill Hill Missionaries on taking vows to the priesthood.
[77]FBIS *Second Afghan War Database.*
[78]FBIS, Trousdale's *Second Anglo-Afghan War database.*

> over Kandahar. Officers said that the padre's heroism was such that he deserved the Victoria Cross.[79]

The Standard stated:

> Rev. Thos. Jackson, a missionary priest from Mill Hill, appears to have behaved with great courage and fortitude. He accompanied the advance guard under fire at Maiwand, was present in the thick of the combat, and shared in the retreat through that terrible desert …[80]

In a despatch of 26 August, 1880, General Primrose wrote: 'I cannot over-value the services rendered … on many occasions by Father T. Jackson, who was always in the foremost of the fight, attending upon and offering every assistance to the wounded, both European and native.' In another despatch, dated 30 August, 1880, he wrote: 'To Father T. Jackson I am deeply indebted for his constant care and attention to the wounded.'[81]A relieved Fr Raatger told Fr Jackson that he had scanned the *Civil and Military Gazette* 'in order to find some news' about his fate at Maiwand. 'Thanks be to God', he wrote, 'I did not find your name among the number of deaths'.[82] Fr Jackson later wrote to a student at Mill Hill,

> I hope that it will never fall to your lot to be a military chaplain, especially during a campaign in a Mohamedan country. It's awfully hard work & far different from what it would be in a European War. For there you would have what they call the "rights of war", the chaplains & other non-combatants wear badges & are not to be fired at, while here the reverse is the case. Nobody's life is in greater danger, even now, than mine is for these people think that I am here for the purpose of encouraging the soldiers to fight, just as their own mullahs or priests call upon them to fight in the name of God & the Prophet. It is the opinion of many of our people here that I shall lie murdered before the winter is over.

He added:

> It seems that no honour or distinction is to be given for the many brave deeds done at Maiwand & at the sortee at Kandahar on August the 14th, because they

[79]*The Tablet*, 15 April 1916. This issue contained Fr Jackson's obituary.
[80]Ibid., *The Standard* cited in 19 July 1884.
[81]Ibid., 19 July 1884.
[82]AMHMS, Raatger to Jackson, 8 August 1880.

> happened to end in defeat. I think it is very unfair. I myself saw deeds of bravery done in their actions that can never be surpassed.[83]

Meanwhile, Fr Browne had accompanied the relief column from Kabul and his letters to Fr Benoit recall the 334 mile march to Kandahar which was covered in twenty-three days. At first, details of Maiwand were withheld but soon the troops were preparing to 'make a rapid march' for Kandahar. Kit and equipment were restricted but by special order of the General, 'the chaplains were allowed two mules each so that they might carry their necessary church furniture.' There followed days of marching under a fierce sun, through well-cultivated valleys, mountain passes and dry river beds; they slept under the stars. By Friday, 27 August they established 'heliographic communication' with the garrison at Kandahar. On the following Sunday, Fr Browne celebrated Mass for the first time since leaving Kabul. 'You have no idea', he told Fr Benoit, '… what a consolation it was to me to have the soldiers once more gathered round me for Mass and for instructions, perhaps for the last time before they would have to encounter the enemy. For a few of them it really was the last time …'

On 31 August, as the relief column reached Kandahar, Fr Browne, wearing khaki, met up with Fr Jackson and joined him in his tent for a meal of 'grapes and water-melon'. But the 'pleasant hour' was not to last for Fr Browne re-joined the relief force in the battle to defeat the Afghans. Of the engagement on 1 September, he wrote:

> I will not attempt to describe the horrors of the battlefield; they are more easily imagined than described. I will only say that in God's mercy the rifle bullets whistled past me and the shells avoided me. I left the battlefield as sound and safe as I had entered it.[84]

After the siege was lifted, Fr Jackson returned to Maiwand where he said Mass on the battlefield and again buried many dead.[85]

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[83]AMHMS, Jackson to unnamed recipient, 5 March 1880. He wrote that one non-Catholic chaplain 'dressed like an officer, carried a revolver' and 'rode with the general and his staff'. The military authorities insisted that chaplains carry a revolver for personal protection but this was 'much against our own will', wrote Fr Jackson. Bishops in England were reluctant to let chaplains wear military uniforms lest their clerical state was regarded as inferior. Catholic chaplains were always unarmed. See Hagerty and Hudd, *Defend Us in Battle*, p.74. The un-named non-Catholic chaplain was probably Reverend Arthur Male, a Wesleyan minister.

[84]*The Opening Door*, pp.37-44.

[85]FBIS**,** Burton, *Valiant Men of God,* p.20.

As for the sensational accounts of the battle published in the English press about the 'unimaginable atrocities committed on the fallen soldiers by the Afghan women', Fr Jackson wrote that such comments were without substance. They were ' … based on hearsay, imagination and the desire to cast aspersions on an enemy who had inflicted one of the few defeats which the British had suffered in India.' Understandably, he commented, Afghan soldiers and people were not disposed to watch their land be invaded and have an alien religion imposed on them.[86]

Besides being mentioned in despatches, Frs Jackson, Browne, Aelen and other chaplains were awarded campaign medals. Fr Jackson's citations, prepared by Fr Browne, included references to the Battles of Girishk on 14 July 1880, Maiwand on 27 July and Sortie Deh Khojah on16 August. In his application for medals, Fr Jackson stated, 'I hereby declare that I was present at the actions … doing all in my power to aid the wounded, without distinction of Creed or Race.'[87] Others considered his bravery worthy of the Victoria Cross.[88]

Having installed an emir in whom they had confidence; the British and Indian armies marched back into India 'and with them the men who were to have established the Mill Hill Mission in Afghanistan'.[89] In October 1881, Fr Alexander Prenger, was sent to replace to replace Fr Jackson but when he arrived at the Afghan frontier, in 1882, all the British troops had been withdrawn. Instead, a large body of troops was now quartered at Quetta where Fr Prenger and other Mill Hill Missionaries ministered to the troops for about a year when the British Government made it a permanent military station. For ecclesiastical purposes it was included in the Vicariate-Apostolic of Bombay and two Jesuit Fathers were sent to Quetta as chaplains. [90]

Post-War Reflections

After hostilities ceased, the Mill Hill Missionaries reflected on their recent military experiences. As Superior of the Mission, Fr Browne acted as Senior Chaplain and was in frequent correspondence with the Vicars Apostolic and army authorities.[91] He informed ecclesiastical authorities of the locations, military engagements and health of

[86]*The Opening Door,* p.35.
[87]AMHMS, Browne to Jackson, 2 February 1881. See *The Tablet*, 23 February 1929 for details of Fr Aelen's medals.
[88]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.54-56. For Fr Aelen see *St Joseph's Advocate*, Spring 1929, p.149.
[89]*The Opening Door*, p.46.
[90]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.75.
[91]AMHMS, Bishop Jacobi to Fr. Browne 29 November 1879. 'I told the Secretary to the Govt. in India to write to you instead of me & told him that you are the Superior of the Mission of Afghanistan & Baluchistan'.

the chaplains. He was assisted in his ministry by helpful Catholic officers but considered the attention to religious duties by ordinary soldiers 'really deplorable … the greater dangers they have to encounter, the more careless they become about their immortal souls …' He took comfort in the fact that he had started a Temperance Society.[92] Bishop Meurin took care of the chaplains' pay and missionary fund, provided Holy Oils and maintained contact with the British military authorities stressing Browne's religious authority over Catholic chaplains.[93] In addition to chaplaincy duties, Fr Browne, like his confrères, exercised his priestly ministry which included saying Mass, hearing Confessions, tending the sick, burying the dead, praying his daily office, and counselling. All had to be fulfilled in the most difficult conditions and often bereft of clerical company.[94]

From letters exchanged between Fr Browne and Fr Temme it became obvious that Fr Browne had been at the Battle of Sherpur, had accompanied a march from Kabul to Kandahar, and was present at the final defeat of Ayub Khan. Fr Temme was on a march from Lundi Kotal to Kabul and from Sibi through the Bolan Pass to Quetta leading three camels carrying his kit through a sand storm.[95]

As their military duties gradually eased, the missioners desperately wished to revert to missionary work. In frustration, Fr Raatger wrote to Fr Browne in May 1881: 'I am loafing about. Nobody can employ me. What am I to do?'[96] He was subsequently appointed to Mill Hill's new mission in Borneo.[97]

Meanwhile, Fr Temme and the newly-arrived Fr Prenger were stationed at Quetta, still learning the native language and working among European troops in an Indian regiment. Like other chaplains, Fr Temme was disappointed by the soldiers' poor attention to their religious duties and their anti-social behaviour. He told Fr Browne,

> We have had very few Easter Communions as yet here in Quetta. Of the European soldiers, I think we had not yet a dozen of them. There are about a hundred in the regiment but very few attend to their religious duties. The only thing they care about is drink, and to provide this they go and rob Europeans and natives ... I shall be glad when I have done with English soldiers.'[98]

[92]AMHMS, Browne to Meurin, 27 August 1879; 7 June 1880.
[93]Ibid., Meurin to The Secretary to Government, Military Department, 1 April, 1880.
[94]Ibid., Browne to Benoit, 6 August 1879. At Peiwar Kotal Fr Browne was 180 miles away from the nearest priest at Peshawar.
[95]Ibid.,Temme to Browne, 23 May 1882.
[96]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.74
[97]AMHMS, Memoir of Fr Gerard Raatger.
[98]Ibid., Temme to Browne, 23 May 1882.

The soldiers, he lamented to Fr Benoit, were not very 'attentive to religious duties at Easter…' and '…the only thing they care about is drink … I shall be glad when I have done with English soldiers. I think there are no worse Catholics in the world than them'. 'European soldiers pretend to be civilized', he continued, 'but are more uncivilized than the barbarians of this country'. He was shocked by the 'scandal of drunkenness and robbery' among European soldiers in Quetta. 'I confess I am tired of the chaplainship … I have been ordained for the mission, but now all the time since I left Europe, I have had to deal with soldiers.' He had no chapel, had to say Mass in a tent and had to carry 'articles on Sunday'. He was willing to go anywhere as long as it was away from Afghanistan.[99] Fr Prenger was similarly 'unsettled' and preferred to read rather than conduct his ministry with the troops. Out of a hundred, only a dozen English, Irish and Anglo-Indian soldiers would attend services. In general, he wrote, soldiers were, 'poor examples of Catholicism'.[100]

More important to the missionaries was their assessment of the prospects of their future mission. Fr Jackson wrote to Bishop Vaughan: 'As I have not had time to learn the language, my intercourse with the Afghans has been limited, and not enough for me to be able to form a correct judgement about the disposition of the people.' But he went on to say that 'one of the greatest obstacles in the way of converting the Afghans is the great difficulty of overcoming influence over them on account of their intense hatred of the Europeans.' Although he wore his cassock and never bore arms, his mere presence, he felt, was an insult to the Afghans. In the likelihood of Kandahar being evacuated, he concluded, 'all chances of mission work will for the present be at an end.'[101]

Missionary Issues: The New Prefecture?

With the end of war and the army's withdrawal, the issue of the new missionary Prefecture re-surfaced but the Vatican appeared uncertain of missionary plans for Afghanistan. In January 1879 O'Callaghan had stated that a new Prefecture in Afghanistan would be entrusted to the Mill Hill Missionaries but by April 1879, when Vaughan pressed the matter with Propaganda, he was told that a precise definition of a territory 'was not yet opportune'.[102]

In July 1879, when Fr Browne and the first cohort passed through Bombay, Bishop Meurin advised that they erect a base in the Punjab, which was within the Vicariate of Agra, rather than Afghanistan. Fr Browne agreed with the bishop but saw the necessity

[99]Ibid., Temme to Benoit, 1 August 1882.
[100]Ibid., Prenger to Benoit, 1 August 1882.
[101]*The Opening Door*, pp.47-50.
[102]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.24.

of first gaining British approval. 'We must secure the Punjab if we are to have a good base and in order to have the Punjab, we must have men whom everyone (i.e. military officials) can understand (i.e. English speaking).'[103]

It had been made clear initially that Mill Hill's involvement with army chaplaincy would result in the institute being able to establish a mission in Afghanistan. The Vatican offer was made on the assumption that Britain intended to annex Afghanistan but with the end of the war it became evident that this was unlikely. For Britain the advantages to be gained by annexation of Afghanistan did not measure up to the costs of maintaining an army of occupation in hostile territory so the British withdrew from Afghanistan in 1881. The replacement of Disraeli's Conservative administration by Gladstone's Liberal Party in 1880 also marked the end of Disraeli's assertive foreign policy. Fr Browne reported that imperial policy prevented any missionary expansion that might involve the army and 'General Stewart has set his face determinedly against all missionary enterprise.'[104]

Vaughan wrote to Fr Jackson asking if the British withdrew from Afghanistan would a new mission still be viable? Fr Jackson replied that sending a missionary into Afghanistan would be tantamount to signing his death warrant. Circumstances that left a priest unprotected among aggressive and unreceptive Afghans was to be prevented and advised that Mill Hill Missionaries should not embark on any further attempt to establish an Afghan missionary structure. In the unlikely event of British annexation, Fr Jackson stated, missionaries might be able to enter the country but results would be very slowly achieved. Bishop Meurin suggested that a solution might be the establishment of a new prefecture in Balochistan with headquarters at Quetta but the Mill Hill priests considered that Balochistan, with few military stations, provided little outlet for missionary work.[105]

Meanwhile, in October 1880, Fr Browne wrote that 'From Rome I have as yet no definite information as to our future except we are to abandon Afghanistan'.[106] In 1881 he was trying to close the mission and get the Vicars Apostolic of Bombay and the Punjab to discuss where the Mill Hill Missionaries might work but he was adamantly against one Mill Hill priest staying alone in the garrison town of Quetta.[107]

[103]*The Opening Door*, pp.12-14.
[104]AMHMS, Browne to Meurin, 7 June 1880.
[105]*The Opening Door*, pp.51-54; A. Camps, 'Mill Hill Missionaries in Afghanistan from 1879 until 1881 and their stay in Quetta-Baluchistan until 1883' in *Studies in Asian Mission History, 1956-1998* (Brill: EBook, 2000), pp.211-258.
[106]AMHMS, Browne to Vaughan, 4 March 1880.
[107]Ibid., Browne to Meurin, 15 October 1880.

Another factor which affected the future of the Afghanistan mission was Cardinal Simeoni's late 1879 decision to transfer supervision of the Borneo mission to the Mill Hill Missionaries. Vaughan wrote to Benoit for suggestions as to who should become the new Prefect in Borneo and it was tacitly accepted that the Afghanistan group must provide the Prefect. Fr Allen was the preferred choice but Browne objected to losing this experienced and trusted priest. On 15 March 1881 Vaughan submitted Fr Jackson's name to Rome and at the end of March the appointment was made. Jackson cleared up his affairs in India, obtained release from the army and arrived in Borneo in August 1881.[108]

The future of a Mill Hill mission to Afghanistan was still under Vatican discussion, however, and, in late-1881, Vaughan was called to Rome to seek a settlement of the matter. Browne and his companions hoped that some of their hopes of a new responsibility might be salvaged by this means and were encouraged by the appointment of Fr Prenger in 1881. But Vaughan and the Vatican had decided that the Afghanistan mission should be closed and the remaining priests be re-deployed. Fr Browne was recalled to London; Frs Aelen, Raatger and Temme were assigned to Madras, where they re-assumed their own names; and Fr Prenger was assigned to Borneo. With a clear end in view, they began to settle their affairs and obtain release from the army. Fr Prenger, the last to leave, did not reach Borneo until 1883.[109]

The Mill Hill mission to Afghanistan had started with great promise. The brief service to the military was conducted admirably and courageously but the apostolic labours of the missionaries ended in disappointment. With the departure of Fr Browne and other Mill Hill Missionaries the military chaplaincies returned to their pre-1879 state. The soldiers were still unhappy with foreign chaplains and the army authorities remained reluctant to appoint non-British chaplains to minister to British troops.

Conclusion

The Mill Hill Missionaries took advantage of British imperial expansion in order to fulfil their evangelising charism and the institute's later account of its involvement in the Second Afghan War was redolent of 'The marching armies of colonial conquest, with their cannon and their swords' who,

> …were Christian and needed chaplains to cater to their spiritual needs. The soldiers of Christ would join the marching caravans and, cross in hand, would build the Church in lands that had never known the blessings of Christianity. The dream was the age-old apostolic dream which had inspired the missionaries

[108]Rafferty, *The Crimson Lily*, p.71.
[109]Ibid., p.75.

> down the years and now was to animate a whole new generation of missionary crusaders.[110]

In Afghanistan, however, the reality of the military-missionary relationship was far removed from a romantic endeavour of military might conjoined with religious fervour.

Mill Hill's optimistic acceptance of the military appendage to its proposed mission in Afghanistan displayed its willingness to undertake a dangerous assignment but it also exemplified the dependence of the Catholic Church's missionary expansion on British imperial policies. Support for a missionary venture was always a secondary concern for the British army facing a hostile foe. Government policy and military authority and tactics determined missionary endeavours.[111]

As *The Tablet* had predicted, chaplaincy in Afghanistan proved difficult for inexperienced padres unfamiliar with both the demands of military life and the extreme climatic conditions, but their personal testimonies vividly illustrate their attempts to confront the religious, social and military challenges that they faced. Their priesthood was conducted in hazardous conditions and whilst they brought the sacraments and spiritual comfort to Catholic officers and men, some soldiers spurned their ministry. They were unable to curb the excesses of men engaged in savage warfare and soldiers turned to alcohol and other comforts for relief despite promises made to the contrary. As ministers to the healthy, wounded and dead, Mill Hill chaplains were admired and treated with respect and courtesy by all ranks who appreciated their brave ministry, offered assistance, and befriended them. The presence of Mill Hill chaplains also sometimes exposed fractious clerical intra-denominational and inter-denominational relationships but circumstances and necessity generated goodwill and co-operation between ministers of the same and different denominations.

Fulfilling their primary function of evangelisation during and after their army chaplaincy proved to be a complicated ecclesiastical process for the missionaries. In April 1887, Cardinal Simeoni expressed the Vatican's desire that Mill Hill Missionaries should now assume missionary responsibility for British controlled Punjab in addition to another mission in Borneo. Canon Benoit remarked to a correspondent in *The Tablet* that 'St. Joseph's Missionary Society was bound by its fundamental rule to be at the disposal of

[110] *The Opening Door*, p.8.

[111] The Second Afghan War was one of many wars fought by the British army in Queen Victoria's reign. See B. Bond (Ed.), *Victorian Military Campaigns,* (London: Tom Donovan Publishing, 1967). Bond's edited volume deals with seven long-forgotten campaigns

the Sovereign Pontiff' and remained at the disposal of the Holy See in any field of labour assigned to it.[112]

For Bishop Vaughan military chaplaincy in Afghanistan was intended to be a means to an end but secondary chaplaincy duties soon far outweighed primary missionary undertakings. His hope of acquiring new fields for missionary endeavour in return for army chaplaincy did not materialise as he envisaged although his priests came to the notice of the Vatican, British military authorities, Catholic rank and file, and ecclesiastical communities in England and India. The recently-ordained missionaries who bravely undertook army chaplaincy in Afghanistan and north-west India had also gained much pastoral experience. They had shared the many dangers, traumas, discomforts and privations of army life, brought spiritual comfort to men in battle, maintained morale, and enhanced the reputation of Catholic chaplaincy in the British army.

This article has shown how the Catholic Church collaborated and co-operated with the British military administration in India anxious to provide Catholic chaplains for British, European and Indian soldiers engaged in bitter warfare. By tracing and examining the experiences of the Mill Hill Missionaries ministering as chaplains, it has revealed how young priests, and ministers of other denominations, faced up conscientiously and courageously to the extreme cultural and physical demands imposed on them and how they conducted their ministry in war. It has also shown that because British interests in India outweighed all others the Mill Hill Missionaries were unable to advance their missionary endeavours in Afghanistan as they had hoped.

In 1887 Mill Hill Missionaries began their apostolic labours in the Punjab where they continued to serve for more than a hundred years.

[112] *The Tablet*, 1 Nov. 1879.